

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 31, 2005

Secretary Gale Norton
U.S. Department of Interior
3120 Elden Street
Herndon, Virginia 20170

Dear Secretary Norton:

As you begin to develop the 2007-2012 leasing plan for energy development on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), we are submitting comments for the public record to promote further discussion about the moratoria in the eastern Gulf of Mexico planning area.

While the decision to change previous Department of Interior policy through the upcoming five year plan is tempting in this current period of high energy prices, we urge you to take into consideration all factors surrounding the moratoria in the eastern Gulf of Mexico planning area, including the continued opposition to lifting this moratoria from the President, U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives.

As demonstrated in the Minerals Management Release on August 8, 2005, there is enough existing data and completed qualitative assessments to provide a comprehensive inventory as mandated by the Energy Policy Act of 2005 in the eastern planning area. According to the Minerals Management Service, 80 percent of the nation's undiscovered, economically recoverable OCS gas is located in the central and western Gulf of Mexico planning areas.

It is important to note that until the 1990 presidential moratoria was put in place by President George H.W. Bush, Florida's waters were being actively developed for oil and gas resources. As far back as the 1940's, the government has been tracking what companies have been able to develop in this area. Gulf Oil company drilled four exploratory wells offshore in the Florida Keys between 1947 and 1959. Between 1947 and 1968 Coastal Petroleum partnered with California Company (later Chevron) and Mobil Oil Company to drill 13 wells in the offshore area between Appalachia and Naples. In 1983, Getty Oil Company drilled the last exploratory well in Florida waters in the Pensacola estuary system near the center of East Bay in Santa Rosa County. To date, none of the offshore wells in Florida owned waters has produced commercial quantities of oil or natural gas.

As Floridians, we have specific economic, environmental and security concerns that accompany opening up the areas currently under moratorium to oil and gas development. The threat of a catastrophic oil spill is not limited to the tourism and fishery industries. Furthermore, since the closing of the ranges in Vieques, Puerto Rico, the Gulf of Mexico is home to a number to training ranges for the US military. Additionally, Eglin AFB and Tyndall AFB use the Gulf Ranges to test and evaluate the latest weapons systems and platforms to fight the War on Terror.

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If petroleum companies were allowed to begin to explore and develop leases, potential impediments to our military training exercises and testing missions would be created. Now is not the time to be hamstringing our military readiness.

While patience is essential, the developments in the deep waters off of our coasts are proving that eventual return on our investments are going to exceed everyone's expectations. There have been over 100 deepwater discoveries to date in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico alone each with triple the amount of barrel of oil per day found in the shallower areas.

In conclusion, as the Department of Interior continues with the development of the 2007-2012 leasing plan, we urge you to join us in protecting Florida's coastline by ensuring that potentially harmful provisions are not included in any final plan. We look forward to working with you to ensure that our coastal protections are continued in the future.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Jim Davis

Mark Bray

Clay Saw

Alfred Hastings

Heama Ros-Lehtinen

Jeff Miller

Debra Wasserman-Schultz

Allen Boyd

Mike Bilinski

Jimmy Brown-White

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Lincoln Diaz-Barrera